

EXHIBIT 225

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THE AFGHANISTAN FILE



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early stages of the Taliban's rise to power our policy was that we would not finance Afghan groups to fight other Afghans. As far as we were concerned the need for fighting had ended with the fall of Dr Najibullah's government in 1992. Once the Taliban were in control of the Afghan government and had been recognised by Saudi Arabia, they might have been eligible for project and budget aid – but at this point we found ourselves in direct dispute over the shelter the Taliban were giving to Bin Laden.

Chapter 14 The Taliban and Bin Laden

Over the 1990s and especially during the early years of the Taliban government, I found my time increasingly occupied by the problem of Osama Bin Laden.

Bin Laden had been one of the many individuals who had assembled in Peshawar at the time of the fall of the Najibullah government in April 1992. I did not see him there and he played no role in the diplomacy that led to the creation of the Mojaddedi government, but while he was there he met Hassan Turabi, the ideologue of the government that had come to power in Sudan in 1989. This meeting led immediately to a new, more active phase in Bin Laden's career.

For practical purposes the new Sudanese government was a military regime headed by General Omar Bashir, but it had a veneer of fundamentalist Islam, and Turabi and his party, the National Islamic Front, provided this. The Front was an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Turabi wanted to spread Islamic revolution, and in particular to bring together all the different movements and parties that espoused this idea into some sort of union. He saw Bin Laden as a person who he would like to associate with his cause, not least because he was rich. He invited him to come to Khartoum and Bin Laden accepted. When the assembly in Peshawar dispersed Bin Laden flew directly to the Sudanese capital, in an aircraft lent by a

rich Saudi businessman. He took a large entourage, mainly of Arabs who had been living on the Afghan frontier.

Bin Laden was feted by the regime in Sudan. He was praised as a 'true Mujahid' and allowed to employ a body of retainers. He bought a large house in Khartoum and a farm north of the city. He gave money for a road-building project. The government announced that the sum was \$10 million, but it was probably less. The original intention was that the road should be financed by Saudi government aid, but when the Sudanese government supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 the aid was suspended. The project was renamed 'The Road of Defiance' – and there was no doubt that the name was chosen as a small gesture of defiance towards Saudi Arabia. At the same time Turabi managed to sell Bin Laden a state leather-tanning factory. It seemed to us in Riyadh when we heard about these transactions that the Sudanese government was exploiting Bin Laden. I very much doubt he would ever have earned any income from the factory. He did, however, establish a contracting business and a trading company dealing in Sudanese agricultural commodities, and I expect these were profitable, if on a fairly modest scale.

At the end of 1993 Bin Laden issued his first public statement attacking Saudi Arabia, which he referred to as Declaration Number One. In this he set out his opposition to the Kingdom's invitation to American troops to help its defence in 1990, and he asked the King to terminate their presence and reform the government. He transmitted this declaration and the statements which followed it by fax to people and institutions in Saudi Arabia. International communications from Sudan were very poor and what he was sending would quickly have come under the control of the Sudanese authorities, so Bin Laden distributed his statements through London. He had a small office there, run by his representative, Khaled Al-Fawwaz. He would fax Fawwaz a statement, and Fawwaz would then organise its onward transmission to multiple recipients in Saudi Arabia.

The initiative coincided with the establishment in London of the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), an Islamist propaganda organisation with an innocuous-sounding name, representing

the views of two Saudi dissidents, Mohammad Al-Massari and Saad Al-Faqih. It was in part Fawwaz who helped these two establish their operation and taught them how to make multiple fax transmissions. The two operations exchanged names and fax numbers of potential recipients of their propaganda. To return the favour Al-Faqih bought a satellite telephone for Bin Laden.

The material that the CDLR transmitted was a mixture of (mostly old) stories of corruption and scandal and the political views of the organisation's founders. Its messages soon became repetitive and most of the recipients in Saudi Arabia found them rather boring, but it certainly upset the Saudi government. Bin Laden's own statements, similar in tone, were transmitted in the name of the Advisory and Reformation Committee. Among other ideas they proposed the break-up of the Saudi state and the creation of two new countries, or Islamic communities, Greater Yemen and Greater Hijaz, which would divide the Arabian Peninsula between them.

In response to the faxes the Saudi government instructed its ambassador in Khartoum to establish contact with Bin Laden and ask him to stop what he was doing. The message was that if he did not stop, legal measures would be taken against him, but if he ceased his activities and came back to Saudi Arabia all would be forgiven. The Bin Laden family likewise sent a stream of members to talk to Osama Bin Laden, including several of his half-brothers, an uncle, two sisters and his mother, but he was utterly unyielding. It was then that I realised how hurt he must have been by the rejection of his proposals in 1990 in the meetings he had with me, Prince Ahmad and Prince Sultan – though at no point did he say anything about these meetings. The family's efforts were organised very much in consultation with the government. At the beginning of the fax transmissions the head of the family had come to see us to say how ashamed they all were of what their errant member was doing.

Eventually, in March 1994, the Bin Laden family decided to disown Osama Bin Laden publicly, which it did by publishing advertisements in newspapers stating that 'this man is no longer a member of our family'. At the same time the government stripped him of his Saudi citizenship, which involved a decree issued by the King. His bank accounts in the Kingdom

were frozen and his property sequestered and sold. The family had already isolated Bin Laden's share in its contracting business and put it in a trust. Many different estimates have been published of the amount of money that Bin Laden might have been able to transfer out of the Kingdom before his assets were frozen or seized. Most seem to be greatly exaggerated. My own estimate is that he is unlikely to have transferred more than \$50 million.

At about this time there was a curious incident in which a small group of Sudanese 'Afghans' – Sudanese Mujahideen who had fought, or been close to the fighting, in Afghanistan – organised an attack on Bin Laden's house. The attack failed. Some of the assailants were killed by Bin Laden's guards; the others were arrested by the Sudanese police. Later they were put on trial and executed.

The episode was strange because it was never established what the assailants' motives were. Perhaps they had views that were more extreme than Bin Laden's and felt that he was not sufficiently revolutionary, or maybe they were involved in some feud that went back to their Afghanistan days. The Sudanese authorities accused them of being agents of the Saudi government, and at their trial they identified themselves as being members of the Ansar al-Islam, an established Sudanese group opposed to Turabi's National Islamic Front.

There is no suggestion that the Sudanese government organised the attack, but it certainly took advantage of it. It used it as a pretext for curbing the activities of the Ansar al-Islam and arresting a large number of its members – and it was also able to suggest to Bin Laden that the Saudi government was trying to kill him, which made him still more hostile to Saudi Arabia and more dependent on his hosts. We heard from our sources that he was becoming increasingly paranoid. He built a wall 2.5 metres tall around his compound, but Turabi, who was very much the controlling influence on Sudanese government policy at the time, would not let him put his own armed guards outside. He insisted on posting a Sudanese guard. This gave Turabi complete control over who had physical access to Bin Laden.

As might be expected, after the assassination attempt Bin Laden became more radical and more active in promoting revolutionary ideas. From the

beginning of his time in Sudan he had been making donations to Islamist groups in other Arab countries, particularly Egypt. From 1994 he seemed to become more closely involved with these groups, and with Sudanese intelligence. He helped finance training camps for Islamist revolutionaries/terrorists in northern Sudan. At the end of 1994 the CIA discovered that his men were trying to organise the killing of its station chief in Khartoum. In November 1995 there was a car-bomb attack on a building belonging to the Saudi National Guard in Riyadh; the building was being used by an American team that was organising training and assistance for the Guard. The bomb killed five Americans and wounded thirty-four Saudis and other expatriates. It was the first attack of its kind on Saudi territory. The four young men who carried out the attack later confessed on Saudi television that they had been inspired by Bin Laden's ideas.

In February 1996 the United States withdrew its embassy from Khartoum because of threats made to American personnel and the lack of an adequate Sudanese government response to American protests and requests for protection. At meetings in Khartoum and Washington the Sudanese were told bluntly that if they wanted the American government to reconsider its decision and wanted to avoid sanctions being imposed on their country, they would have to change their policies. The core elements of the US demands were that Sudan should stop supporting Islamist revolutionary movements and expel Bin Laden. The Sudanese government was taken aback by the intensity of the Americans' anger.

In March the Sudanese President, Omar Bashir, came to Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage. He asked for a meeting with Crown Prince Abdullah, to follow up on diplomatic contacts that had been under way for some months. He explained that he would be willing to hand over Bin Laden, but when Prince Abdullah asked, 'When?', referring to the fact that the diplomatic exchanges had already gone on for quite a long time, Bashir said that he first wanted an assurance that Bin Laden would not be prosecuted. Such a guarantee was completely out of the question, given that Bin Laden had been encouraging and financing terrorist activities and trying openly to subvert the Saudi government, and Prince Abdullah explained this. His

concluding words to the Sudanese President were, 'Nobody can be above the law'. This brought their meeting to an end. Bashir returned to Sudan and quite soon afterwards it seems that Bin Laden was told to leave.

Interestingly, the Sudanese also offered to hand over Bin Laden to the Americans, but the offer was turned down because, the Americans claimed, at that point they did not yet have sufficient evidence to prosecute him.

Bin Laden had only one place to go. He had been in touch with Maulvi Yunus Khalis in Jalalabad for some months, just in case he had to leave Sudan, and he had been told that if he needed to take refuge in Afghanistan, he would be welcome. So, in May 1996 a jet was leased from Ariana Afghan Airlines and in two flights it moved Bin Laden, his three wives, his children and a large force of followers and guards to his new home. He lived there under the protection of the Jalalabad Shura.

Once installed, Bin Laden lost no time in resuming his propaganda activities. In August he issued a long statement which he called a 'Declaration of Jihad on the Americans Occupying the Two Holy Places'. Among other matters this statement discussed how an alliance of his enemies had 'delivered him to his exile' and how the Saudi government had become 'the agent' of imperialist Jews and Christians. The statement was faxed by his representative to London newspapers. It was noticed but, being made up of the most bizarre and conspiratorial fantasies, little of it was published.

Very soon afterwards, in September, Jalalabad fell to the Taliban, which took over Bin Laden and his entourage along with the possessions and militia of Yunus Khalis. The new regime promptly sent a message to the Saudi government saying that it had 'inherited' Bin Laden and that it had 'given him refuge'. It did not offer to hand him back to us. We replied, in effect, that the Taliban could keep Bin Laden, but we would expect them to stop him from issuing anti-Saudi statements. This the Taliban undertook to do – but their promises were promptly shown to be worthless. Soon after the Taliban took Kabul that autumn Bin Laden gave first a press conference and then a long interview to an American television network. On both occasions we protested to the Taliban authorities and on both

occasions we were told it would not happen again. We had the impression that Bin Laden was establishing rather good relations with the Taliban – an impression confirmed the following year when the entire Bin Laden entourage moved to Kandahar.

Both the Saudi and American governments were now seriously concerned about Bin Laden, not just because of his statements, though these were a continuous irritant, but because he seemed still to be encouraging anti-Saudi and anti-Western terrorism. When Prince Sultan, the Minister of Defence, visited Washington in March 1997 he proposed to President Bill Clinton that our two countries should establish a joint intelligence committee to collect information on terrorist activities in general and Bin Laden in particular. This committee would put on a formal and regular basis the exchanges we had had with the Americans for many years. The President liked the idea, and the next day he sent George Tenet, the Director of the CIA, to see Prince Sultan in the government guest house where he was staying. The result of their meeting was the creation of a committee on which all the intelligence organisations of both countries were represented, at the operational level. It met every quarter. Sadly, it did not achieve very much.

In February 1998 Bin Laden produced the longest and most elaborate of his many statements, which he issued under the aegis of the newly formed International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, a body apparently made up of Al-Qaeda and various associated groups in other Muslim countries. The new manifesto contained what had by now become standard material. It stated that '... for more than seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorising its neighbours and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighbouring Muslim peoples'. It ended with what purported to be a fatwa, a legal judgment, addressed to all Muslims: 'To fight and kill Americans and their allies, whether civilians or military, is an obligation for every Muslim who is able to do it in any country'. The statement and the 'fatwa' were sent to the editor of one of

the Arab newspapers in London and they were broadcast by the Al Jazeera television network.

The Americans' response, in part, was to send Bill Richardson, their new ambassador to the United Nations, on a short visit to Kabul in March. He was accompanied by Tom Simons, the US ambassador in Islamabad. The two met Mohammad Rabbani, the Taliban's spokesman for foreign affairs, and over lunch they discussed the 'fatwa'. The Americans said that this constituted blatant incitement to murder and asked that Bin Laden be arrested and handed over to the United States. Rabbani and the other Taliban officials with him listened but avoided making any commitment. They merely assured the American party that Bin Laden was not a qualified Islamic scholar.¹

For its part, Saudi Arabia continued to send protests to the Taliban about Bin Laden's activities, and they continued to ignore them. At one point the Taliban government was bold enough to ask for financial help; it was turned down flatly because it had not kept any of its promises about Bin Laden and was still fighting other Afghans. We were angry not only because of the stream of statements and interviews – there were several in late 1997 and early 1998 – but because in January 1998 our border forces had arrested a group of Bin Laden's followers who were trying to smuggle some Russian-made Saggar anti-tank missiles into Saudi Arabia from Yemen. Apparently, they were planning to use these in attacks on police stations.

The one small piece of good news we received around this time, in March or April 1998, was that the Taliban had taken Bin Laden's satellite telephone, which he used for some of his interviews, and replaced his guards with their own on his compound in Kandahar. These moves seemed likely to complicate, but not stop, his propaganda efforts. It was decided in conversations between me and Crown Prince Abdullah that it might help if I were to go to Kandahar and try to meet the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar.

We arranged a visit in June. I was accompanied by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Turki, who had recently retired as Minister of Islamic Affairs and was now Secretary General of the Muslim World League. We stopped in

Islamabad to pick up General Naseem Rana, the head of the ISI, who had agreed to accompany us to show Omar that we had Pakistan's support. It was the first time Sheikh Abdullah and I had been to Kandahar. We were struck by how dry, dusty and desert-like this region was, very different from Kabul and the North-West Frontier, which are quite green and colourful in early summer. In Kandahar there were broken buildings and the remains of war everywhere, as well as a very large number of trucks. Some of them were from Pakistan, covered in the extraordinary decorations that Pakistani truckers love; others were from Iran and from other parts of Afghanistan. We were escorted from the airport by the Taliban militia in a Land Cruiser with a few men with machine guns in front and one behind. After lunch we were taken to see Mullah Omar.

The meeting took place in a single-storey building – like most of the buildings in Kandahar – which we entered by a long corridor leading to a big, semicircular reception room. Here was the mullah. He was thin and tall, with a long beard, one eye and what seemed like an arm injury and possibly an injury to his leg – though I never saw him walk. He and his entourage were barefoot and wore mud-coloured clothes. They were sitting on rugs and cushions on the floor – there was no other furniture in the room. In all there were about fifteen or twenty people present and several went in and out during the meeting that followed. It was all quite friendly. We exchanged greetings and then I spoke at some length about what Bin Laden had been doing while he had been living in Afghanistan and about the undertakings the mullah's government had given that it would stop his activities. I ended by saying that I wanted Bin Laden handed over to Saudi Arabia.

Mullah Omar replied that he considered the security and safety of the Kingdom most important. He would never forget the help it had given to Afghanistan during the fight against the Soviet occupation, or the help it gave to Muslims everywhere. So, he said, in principle he was willing to give up Bin Laden, but at the same time he felt constrained by his obligations, having given refuge to the man. I replied that, though I understood his reservations, he should consider some of the passages in the Quran and the

Hadith which state that the security of the community as a whole should take precedence over the interests of an individual. I quoted to him a verse from the Quran. If I remember right, it was this:

O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful. (49:6)

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Turki added some remarks in the same vein. Together we suggested that we should establish a joint committee of ulema from both our countries to draft a legal judgment which would allow Mullah Omar to surrender his guest. The committee would meet within two weeks. It was understood by everybody present that Bin Laden would be handed over, and that the purpose of the committee was simply to draw up a document which would give this move formal sanction. At the same time I made it plain to Mullah Omar that once we had Bin Laden relations between our countries would move beyond the stage of diplomacy, but no specific financial arrangement was offered, or asked for. And, I should add, we never thought at the time of the meeting, or earlier, of making any attempt to bribe any of the people around Mullah Omar. The idea would have been reasonable if it had had a chance of success, but from everything we had learnt the mullah's followers were utterly loyal and terrified of crossing him. It would also have been very difficult to identify who might have been the most influential and the most susceptible to financial inducements. The inner circles of the Taliban were mysterious and the people we met were nameless. The mullah himself, of course, was not interested in money at all.

In July 1998, a month after our visit, a personal adviser of Mullah Omar, Mullah Wakeel, came to Riyadh to reassure Crown Prince Abdullah and me that the Taliban leadership was in the process of selecting its members of the committee and that it was still on track to hand over Bin Laden. These are my minutes of this meeting:

Meeting of Prince Turki with a delegation sent by Mullah Omar to Riyadh 13 July 1998

The meeting held at 11:15 on Monday 13 July 1998 with the Afghan delegation included:

1. Mullah Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, Adviser to Mullah Mohammad Omar, Amir of Afghanistan
2. Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, Minister of the Civil Aviation Authority of Afghanistan
3. Mullah Mutiyullah Akhund Zada, Official from the Afghan Ministry of the Hajj

From the Saudi side the meeting was attended by:

1. HRH Prince Turki AlFaisal, President of General Intelligence
2. HE Dr Abdullah bin Abdulmohsen Al-Turki
3. Salman bin Mohammad Al-Amri, Officer-in-Charge of the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Afghanistan

The Afghan delegation relayed its government's response on the topic of the rogue Osama Bin Laden who is using his position in Afghanistan to threaten the safety and stability of the Kingdom following the Taliban-controlled Afghan government allowing him to reside in the country. This was a response to what was requested of the Afghans during the Saudi delegation's visit to Afghanistan.

At the start of the conversation, Mullah Mutawakil went over the current conditions in Afghanistan and the Kingdom's positions on the Afghan issue over the past twenty or so years. He expressed his Government's appreciation of Saudi Arabia's admirable support on the Afghan issue, which has turned it from just a single people's problem to a worldwide Islamic issue. The forces for good in the Islamic world have backed Afghanistan with direct support from the Kingdom. He

expressed this by saying, 'Afghanistan is a country shared by both of us, and the Kingdom has spared no expense in supporting it. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is the capital for all Muslims and thus it is everyone's responsibility to protect it. Its standing alongside us confirms this. It was Saudi Arabia that recognised our government before anyone else. Veritably, those who do not thank others do not thank God.'

'As you know, some Arabs came to Afghanistan at the onset of the jihad and have remained there until now. These include Bin Laden, who was located in Jalalabad before we took it over. He had a lot of potential and the previous groups supported him and considered him a brother. When we managed to take control of Jalalabad, the officer-in-charge of the embassy complained about Bin Laden's presence in the region and the fact that he was given the opportunity to be interviewed by journalists. We moved him to Kandahar where we had him vow not to take any action against the Kingdom or oppose it. What recently happened in Khost took place in coordination with the Kashmiri Ansar Group (which has a camp in Khost) and the help of others, the most prominent being the Pakistani journalist Yusuf Zay who works as a correspondent for several American and Western agencies and travelled to the United States immediately after the press conference. Zay has admitted his mistake in this regard.'

'Mullah Omar summoned Bin Laden to Kandahar to discuss these developments with him, telling him, "You broke the vow you took and did something awful that affects us and others".'

'Mullah Omar explained to Bin Laden that the journalists that interviewed him collaborate with the Americans, saying, "You claim to be against the Americans, so what kind of contradiction is this?" He went on to pressure Bin Laden to leave the country. Bin Laden responded, "God's land is vast, but I will depart and leave my children in Afghanistan." The meeting ended with this understanding.'

'You all know now that the camps belonged to jihadist groups and are now used by Bin Laden and the Pakistani Ansar Group that fights in Kashmir. We made the decision to close these foreign camps

whether they belonged to Ansar or not. We will not be able to expel these individuals; however, closing the camps will get them to leave Afghanistan, which suits everyone.'

'One might say that Bin Laden helps us, but this is incorrect as his capabilities are modest at best. He has promised us on more than one occasion to provide support for projects, but he has proven incapable. When he requests a meeting with any official, we expect him only to ask for more assistance.'

'We know that people come and go, but that states stay. No doubt you agree with us that our relationship with you is one of understanding and brotherhood and that we can overcome anything that tries to muddy it.'

'As for Bin Laden's *fatwa* against the Americans, I met with him and told him that he is not a religious scholar and that he has not consulted with Afghan clerics on this issue. In response, he showed me written *fatwas* by Pakistani clerics, which we then told the Americans about. We believe that Israel and America are the reason behind the Islamic world's problems. Mullah Omar has said that it is imperative to stand up to the enemy of the ummah with action, not words, direct confrontation, not sabotage.'

'We would also like to inform you that Bin Laden will be swiftly expelled from Afghanistan and will not be on our side. Others will accuse us of taking money to hand him over. He does have supporters inside Afghanistan as well as good contacts with a large number of individuals because of the financial support he has provided them. It would be better to examine this together and collaborate on coming up with a mutually beneficial solution. In Afghanistan, we agreed to apply pressure on Bin Laden to get him to leave the country. If you have another opinion on the matter, I am ready to continue our discussion until we reach a solution that satisfies everyone.'

'At the end, it was agreed that discussions on the subject would continue, but we assured the delegation that it would be best to hand Bin Laden over to us and for them to get out of this bad situation, which

would be in both of our interests. We will meet the delegation again in the coming days to continue the conversation.

S5/11/82-84

We then sent Salman Mohammad al-Amri, the Chargé d'Affaires at the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Afghanistan at that time, to Kandahar to follow up on this meeting, and three weeks later he sent me a cable, dated 10 August 1998:

**To His Royal Highness Prince Turki AlFaisal
President of General Intelligence**

Peace and blessings be upon you.

This is a follow-up on your instructions about meeting the Taliban leadership on the outcome of your visit to Kandahar and Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil and his delegation's visit to the Kingdom concerning the activities of Bin Laden and what the Taliban must do about this disobedient individual.

Accordingly, I would like to inform you that the meeting with Wakil Ahmad occurred last week. We discussed the measures that have been taken, and those that need to be taken. He explained that after returning from the Kingdom he met Mullah Omar and some of the Taliban leadership. They agreed to what he told them was discussed in the Kingdom. The meeting occurred at Kandahar airport. Subsequently, Wakil Ahmad headed to Islamabad and, based on what he claimed, on the agenda was a discussion about the camps located in Afghanistan that the Taliban claims belong to the Kashmiri Ansar Group and must be closed.

After discussing the topic with him, Wakil Ahmad promised me that their response would be ready within a week. He also promised me that he will contact me to let me know on what date I should travel to meet the leaders in Kandahar to get the response. I was actually ready to travel last Wednesday on the UN flight that goes to Kandahar twice

a week. However, after reaching out to Wakil Ahmad, he informed me that the Taliban leadership had not come to a decision yet. Most recently, the trip has been postponed until tomorrow, Sunday. I will stay in Kandahar until I get the response that they promised me. From there, you will be contacted to review the latest findings.

Kindly review and pass along.

Respectfully yours,

Salman Mohammad al-Amri

Just three days before Salman Mohammad al-Amri sent this cable an event had taken place which I can see in retrospect may have been the key to our discussions with the Taliban coming to nothing – though dealing with that body was always so difficult and its leadership's thinking so opaque that it is difficult to be sure.

On 7 August there were two appalling bombings of American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Both involved truck bombs that exploded in parking lots next to the embassies. In all 224 people were killed, most of them Kenyan citizens who had nothing to do with the US embassy in their country. There was no doubting that Bin Laden was behind this attack. The CIA and the FBI had already been working to break up what they believed was an Al-Qaeda cell in Nairobi, and they had much material that now became very significant. More decisively, one of the perpetrators, who was travelling back to Afghanistan, was arrested as he passed through Pakistan; he confessed to carrying out the attacks at the behest of Bin Laden. The American government now sent a message to the Taliban leadership saying that it had absolute proof of Bin Laden's terrorist activities and that it wanted to arrest the man. The reply they got was that there was '... no proof' and that Bin Laden was 'being unfairly persecuted'.

So, President Clinton ordered retaliatory strikes. On the night of 20 August the US Navy launched seventy-five cruise missiles at establishments known to be associated with Bin Laden around Khost, Kandahar and

Jalalabad. They were camps used for training Bin Laden's own people for terrorist operations and for training Kashmiri/Pakistani militants for operations in the Indian part of the disputed region of Kashmir. The Americans had intelligence that Bin Laden was going to be in one of the camps at the time, a place he visited quite often and from which he had issued his long statement in February. As it happened, Bin Laden had been in a meeting in the camp that day – but several hours earlier than the attack. Possibly he changed the timing at the last minute as a routine security precaution. Instead of Bin Laden and his aides, the casualties from the missile strikes were other Arabs, Pakistanis and Afghans.

At the same time as the missiles were fired at the camps around Jalalabad the Al-Shifa chemicals factory near Khartoum was destroyed by a missile attack, causing one fatality and a number of casualties. It was believed, on the basis of soil samples taken by a CIA agent, that the plant was manufacturing precursor substances which might be used in the production of chemical weapons, which were a particular concern of President Clinton. In fact, it seems the intelligence was faulty. The plant made simple pharmaceuticals and the US government never admitted its mistake.

On 23 August 1998, three days after the missile attacks, I received the following cable from Salman Mohammad al-Amri regarding the Jalalabad attack.

Peace and blessings be upon you,

In reference to cable no. 3/w/3/30578 dated 23/08/1998 mentioned in cable no. 205/136 about the outcome of the American strike on the rogue group (Bin Laden). I would like to inform you that new information points to the following:

1. The death toll at Camp Zhawar (Badr 1), located approximately 6 kilometres from the border with Pakistan has reached 27 and there are 53 injured, a number of whom have been moved to Peshawar for treatment. Information indicates that approximately

15 of these are in serious condition. The dead can be divided into 3 groups:

- a. 13 Arabs: We do not know their nationalities or names. They were buried in their clothing and without being identified.
- b. 13 Pakistanis and Kashmiris from the Ansar Group.
- c. 1 Afghan.
2. All of those killed and injured were from groups that received training at the above-mentioned camp. This includes the pro-Kashmiri Khalid bin Al-Walid Brigade, a number of whose trainees had their graduation ceremony at the camp. After eating dinner, Bin Laden left the camp for Jihad Wahl Camp at approximately 21:00 on Thursday evening. Missiles hit the site about 10 minutes after he departed.
3. Most injuries occurred at the above-mentioned camp where the majority of the groups had come to attend the ceremony. One of the missiles hit a weapons depot near the camp mosque and led to the destruction of the depot and the weapons in it. Nobody was killed at any of the other camps even though they were directly struck, even the Khalden and Jihad Wahl camps. This owes to the fact that there were only small numbers of people in these camps at the time they were hit.
4. The camps included:
 - a. Jihad Wahl which was set up by Hekmatyar during the jihad. It was vacant until last year when several training sessions were held there for Arabs and the Kashmiri Ansar Group, which receives support from Bin Laden and is called Camp Badr 2.
 - b. Zhawar receives new Arab and non-Arab trainees (Badr 1) and is loyal to Bin Laden.

- c. Khalden was the camp of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam's service offices and was then taken over by the Palestinian Abu Zubaidah, who left it earlier this year. Currently, several Arabs and members of the Ansar Group live in the camp and some receive training there.
- d. All of these camps are loyal to Bin Laden and we have produced a number of reports on them over the past years.

- 5. These strikes have not had any impact on Bin Laden, but rather it is believed that they have been a turning point for the extremist groups loyal to him. Yesterday when Bin Laden reached Kandahar, he said that this strike had woken up all Muslims across the world and that they will support him both morally and materially to stand up to America. One of his advisers stated that this action will push them to carry out more operations against Americans wherever they may be found.

- 6. The explosion heard in Jalalabad the same moment that the above-mentioned camps in Khost were struck was a blast from the same type of Tomahawk cruise missile that hit the Tora Bora camp, which Bin Laden left last year for Kandahar. The camp is now deserted and has no more than 7 Afghan guards. Intelligence indicates that none were harmed in the strike.

- 7. An Italian died after being shot in Kabul yesterday, and a Frenchman was injured during protests and security disturbances that occurred yesterday in the majority of Afghan cities. The Frenchman was moved to Islamabad for treatment. Intelligence indicates that the two men were UN representatives: one was a soldier and the other a civilian. Kofi Annan released a statement to the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs assigning it responsibility for the incident and requested that it protect foreigners working in Afghanistan. Four Arab individuals were

arrested and accused of committing the crime. They will stand trial in the coming days.

Please review and pass along.
Mohammad/35

During the second half of July and the whole month of August, while these events were unfolding, we heard nothing more from Mullah Omar, so in early September 1998 it was decided that I should go to Kandahar once more. I went again via Islamabad, where on 18 September I met Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, along with General Naseem Rana. In accordance with what I had agreed with Crown Prince Abdullah, I now asked that General Rana should accompany me again to back up my message that what had been agreed in June had to be implemented. We flew on to Kandahar the next day in the Prime Minister's Airbus, which was able to land at this very provincial airport because the Russians had extended the runway. In all there were six or seven of us, including General Rana's deputy, an official from the Pakistani Foreign Ministry and an interpreter to translate between English and Pashto.

We were driven to the same building in which I had met Mullah Omar in June, and this time we went straight into a meeting with the mullah and much the same group of silent, nameless people who had been there the last time. General Rana began the proceedings by saying how important it was that agreements be honoured for the sake of good relations between all parties, and then he handed the discussion over to me. I ran through our previous meeting and ended by reminding Mullah Omar of his commitment. Much to my surprise he said simply, 'I never agreed to this'. I reminded him that in June I had summarised very clearly what had been agreed before I left, and he replied, 'No, it must have been a mistake in translation'. Next, he denied that his adviser, Mullah Mutawakil, had said in Riyadh in July that his government was in the process of selecting members of the joint Saudi-Afghan committee of ulema.

Then he launched into a tirade. He asked why Saudi Arabia was being so horrible to Bin Laden, who was 'a good Muslim' who had helped Afghanistan. Instead of asking for Bin Laden to be extradited, the Saudi government should put its hand in the hand of the Afghan people and fight the enemy which was occupying its own country. It was the United States that was pushing Saudi Arabia to put pressure on Afghanistan to hand over Bin Laden. The Saudi leaders were instruments in the hands of the Americans. They were helping the Americans inflict hunger on the Iraqi people. The Americans were in the Holy Places and it was very wrong of the Saudi ulema to allow their presence there. If Bin Laden could not carry out the task of expelling them, or was killed in the process, thousands of others would take over his work. Then the mullah went on to attack Iran for its aggression against Afghanistan. As he spoke his voice grew shrill. He sweated, almost as if he had a fever.

It was the most extraordinary rant, and there came a point when I was not prepared to listen to it any longer. I stood up and before I left the room I asked the translator to tell the mullah that I would not allow him to attack the Kingdom, its leadership, its ulema and its people in such a way, and that his broken promise and what he had said that day would eventually cause great harm to the Afghan people. I asked General Rana to be a witness to what I had said. The whole meeting did not last more than half an hour or forty-five minutes. The lunch that had been prepared for us was left uneaten.

On the flight back to Islamabad, during which the crew kindly shared their lunch with us, we discussed what had happened. Why had Mullah Omar changed his mind? We decided that either he had come much more under the influence of Bin Laden (and certainly what he had said sounded very much like 'Bin Laden-speak') or maybe he had been angered by the cruise missile attacks. Perhaps he had decided much earlier to go back on his commitment. After all, the American missile strikes had come well after we were supposed to have established the committee of ulema. It was interesting that at no point did Mullah Omar show any understanding that, now his movement controlled virtually all of Afghanistan, having finally gained control of Mazar-i-Sharif in the previous month, it would need to start building relations with

the outside world and conforming to some international norms.

During the flight I drafted the report I would send to Crown Prince Abdullah. It read as follows:

**To His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz
Crown Prince, First Deputy Prime Minister of the Council of Ministers,
and Commander of the National Guard**

Sir,

This letter is further to what I raised in no. 1/9/3/434 dated 13/07/1998 regarding the handing over of Bin Laden by the Taliban government.

I hereby submit to Your Royal Highness recommendations if the Taliban refuses to deport Bin Laden from Afghanistan or hand him over to the Kingdom.

1. Withdrawing our Chargé d'Affaires and telling officials there the reason why.
2. Ceasing all dealings with visitors from the Afghan government.
3. Having the Kingdom activate its contacts among all Afghan groups, particularly members of the Northern Alliance, who oppose the Taliban.
4. Having the Kingdom bring up the presence of Bin Laden and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan with the Organisation of the Islamic Conference so that the latter issues a resolution condemning the situation.
5. Urging relief organisations to cease work with the Taliban government.
6. Cut off relations with the group.

Sir, this must be brought to your attention. I wish you success.
Your servant,
Turki AlFaisal

I showed this draft to General Rana, and we discussed what Pakistan might do as well. It seemed it might be appropriate for Pakistan to reduce its diplomatic staff in Afghanistan and close some of its consulates, but not sever diplomatic relations because we needed to have at least one channel of communication remain open. I also suggested that Pakistan should stop whatever financial assistance it was giving to Afghanistan and mount a campaign to stop smuggling across the border. I wanted to make the Taliban suffer straight away because of its leader's broken promise. On our side, the Saudi government promptly implemented my recommendations. However, we continued humanitarian aid to refugees and continued to allow Afghans to come to Makkah and Madinah for pilgrimage.

We had no substantial contact with the Taliban from this time onwards. Naseem Rana, with whom I enjoyed working, retired from the ISI a month after our visit to Kandahar. Under his successor, General Khwaja Ziauddin, who had rather good relations with the Taliban, we received a message that Mullah Omar had been 'in a bad mood' the day he met me. That fact was obvious, and the message was not accompanied by any hint that he might be reconsidering his position on Bin Laden. There was no further message.

Whenever Taliban officials came to Saudi Arabia for Hajj or Umra we were willing to listen to what they had to say on an informal level, and we were always given the message that they wanted to restart relations. We always replied that we wanted Bin Laden first, and there our conversations ended. We also talked to the Pakistani government about what information it was getting from Kandahar, but we were always told that Mullah Omar was adamant that he would not change his mind. Certainly, this is what Bin Laden believed, because quite soon after my visit he gave a television interview to the BBC in which he gleefully described how I had failed to get Mullah Omar to give him up.

From the time it established control over the country the Taliban government became an international pariah. Most of the world was

offended by its refusal to establish a broad-based government or observe diplomatic norms, by its brutality and by its appalling treatment of women. In December 1998 the United Nations passed a resolution in which it threatened sanctions on Afghanistan for its government's harbouring of terrorists, violations of human rights, promotion of drug trafficking and refusal to accept UN initiatives for a ceasefire between its forces and those of Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Speaking in a debate before the resolution, the US ambassador declared that Afghanistan-based terrorism had become an international plague. American policy at this time and for the next two years and nine months was to try to engage with the Taliban while squeezing them with economic sanctions. It rejected the idea of further missile strikes, given that the attacks of August 1998 had failed and further strikes would be bound to cause civilian deaths. Instead, it considered various plans for capturing Bin Laden, either by having someone in his entourage betray him so that he could be seized by an American snatch squad operating out of Pakistan, or by having American allies, notably Ahmad Shah Massoud's forces, ambush him and either capture or kill him. None of these plans came to anything. The ISI was nervous about getting involved and Massoud's forces were in the wrong part of the country.

Nothing improved in Afghanistan in 1999. Fighting continued between the Taliban and Massoud and the Hazaras. The country grew poorer and the government became increasingly unpopular. Most of the population resented having Pathan governors from Kandahar imposed on them. Everybody resented the government's conscription drive, the increase in taxes and the greed and corruption of some of the Taliban officials.

On 19 January 2000 the United Nations acted on its threat to impose sanctions. Security Council Resolution 1333 imposed a complete ban on the sale of arms to Afghanistan, the seizure of Taliban assets outside the country and a ban on international travel by Afghan officials. It also demanded the extradition of Bin Laden.

In October came an attack on the USS *Cole*, a very large, expensive and sophisticated guided-missile destroyer which was moored in Aden

harbour. A small boat full of explosives blew up alongside it, knocking a twelve-metre hole in its hull and killing seventeen American sailors. The CIA could not find solid proof that Bin Laden had planned the attack, but it was quite certain he was responsible.

In February the following year, during a campaign against the Hazaras in the centre of the country, Mullah Omar ordered the destruction of giant statues of two Buddhas in the Bamiyan Valley. These were extremely important monuments of great cultural significance. There was an international outcry. A Muslim delegation, including Saudi ulema, travelled to Kabul to remonstrate with Taliban officials. It explained that under Sharia law a government should respect other religions in the country which it rules, as had been the practice since the time of the Muslim conquests in the seventh century. The reply of the Taliban was simple: 'You do not understand'. On 10 March Mullah Omar's orders were carried out and the statues were demolished by dynamite and tank fire.

In May the Taliban caused more international outrage. They closed the Italian hospital in Kabul, accusing the European doctors there of consorting with Afghan women. They also declared that all Hindus in the country should wear yellow badges. On this occasion they took some note of the outcry and after a few weeks modified the rule to state only that Hindus should always carry their identity papers.

Two months after this, in August, I resigned as Director of the General Intelligence Department. I was frustrated by my failure to extract Bin Laden from Afghanistan, and particularly by my failure in the past three years to make any progress at all in this direction. But the main reason I left the department was that I had been in the job for twenty-four years and I felt I was becoming stale. I had no idea at the time that the issue of Afghanistan which had dominated my time at the GID virtually from the beginning was moving towards its ghastly denouement.

Two important events followed. The first took place in Afghanistan and appeared to mark a decisive turn in the civil war. Since the spring Ahmad Shah Massoud had been putting increasing pressure on the Taliban army. In April he had made a visit to Europe. He had addressed the European

Parliament in Strasbourg, greatly impressed the European and American officials he had met and shown himself to be very popular among Afghans of all ethnic groups abroad. Hitherto the Americans had been reluctant to give him wholehearted backing because he was not a Pathan – i.e. not a member of the most numerous ethnic group in Afghanistan, which we all tended to assume would have to be at the centre of any stable government in that country. Now they started to see him as a very desirable and credible alternative to the Taliban. On his return to his country the United Front he had formed with Abdul Rashid Dostum, who had once again appeared in Afghanistan, and Ismail Khan, operating with Iranian support, launched a new campaign and made considerable progress. In June some of Massoud's units came close to Kabul.

In response the Taliban enlisted the support of Al-Qaeda. On 9 September two young north Africans with Belgian passports, posing as journalists, went to conduct an 'interview' at the United Front's headquarters in the Panjshir Valley. Using a bomb hidden in a video camera they blew themselves up and killed Massoud.

Two days later, as the whole world knows, four aircraft were hijacked by members of Al-Qaeda in the United States. One was heading towards Washington, D.C., where the hijackers were probably intending to fly it into either the Capitol or the White House, but its passengers tried to regain control of the aircraft and it crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. Another was flown into the Pentagon in Washington. And two were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York. In all 2,996 people died and some 6,000 others were injured. The dead included 343 firefighters. For the United States the loss was not just human and material; the attacks were a colossal affront to the country's pride, prestige and security. They had to be avenged.